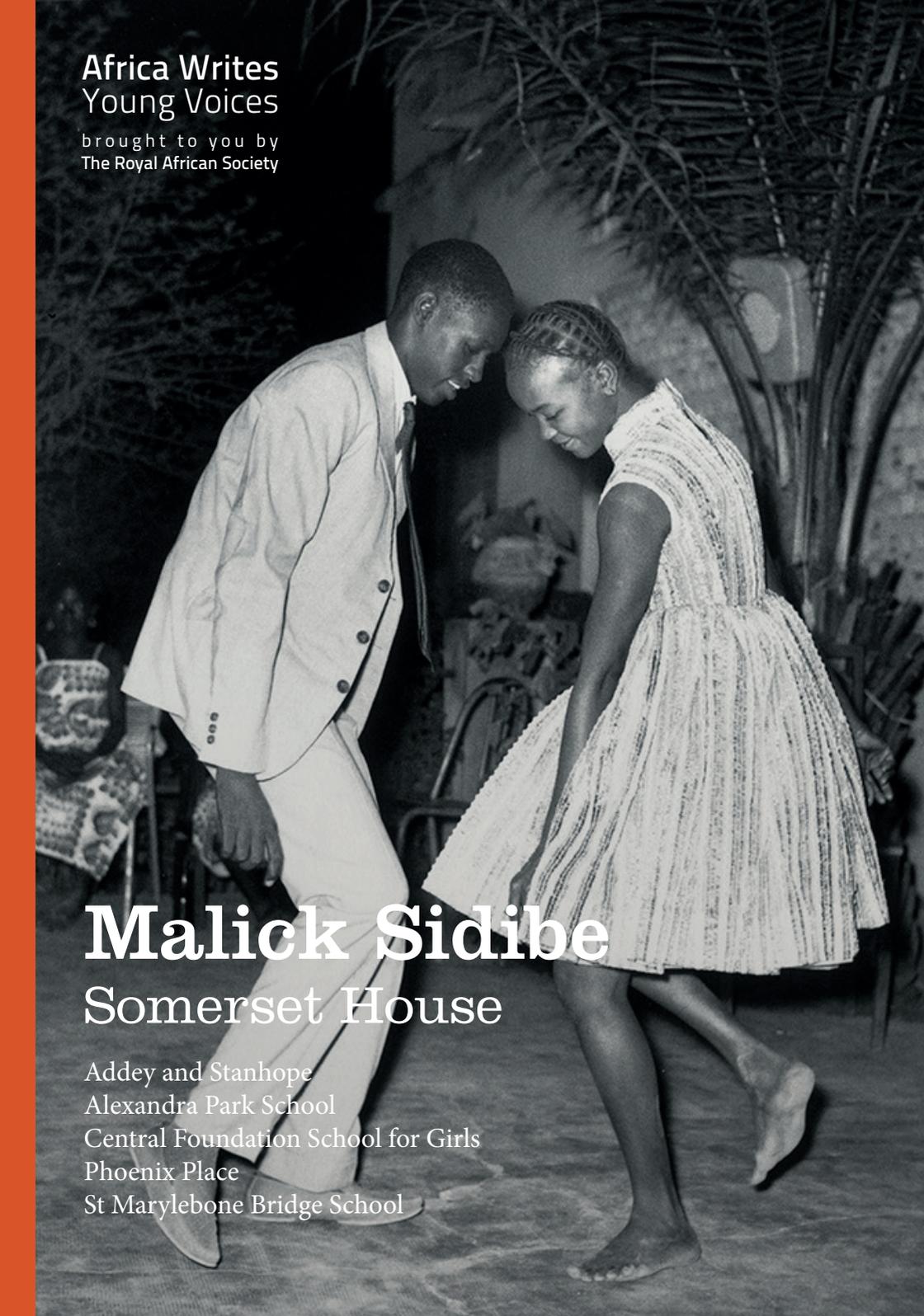


Africa Writes Young Voices

brought to you by
The Royal African Society



Malick Sidibe

Somerset House

Addey and Stanhope
Alexandra Park School
Central Foundation School for Girls
Phoenix Place
St Marylebone Bridge School

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Young Voices

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Africa Writes: Young Voices is an educational project designed and delivered by Royal African Society Education.

Thanks to our education programme funders, the Foyle Foundation and Arts Council England.

These workshops were run in partnership with the Learning and Participation team at Somerset House, with thanks to exhibition partners Gallery Magnin-A and 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair.

Anthology design by D237.

Thanks and acknowledgements

With thanks to Annette Richardson, Verity Richards, George Collum and colleagues in the Learning and Participation Team at Somerset House.

Thanks to all the teachers and students who took part in the project.

For more information about the Royal African Society Education Programme, please contact Joanna Brown, RAS Education and Outreach Programme Manager at ras_education@soas.ac.uk

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Malick Sidibé: The Eye of Modern Mali

An Africa Writes: Young Voices project

The 'Bamako Beats' workshops were held at Somerset House in November 2016 and February 2017 as part of a creative collaboration between the Somerset House Learning Team and the Royal African Society Education programme, Africa Writes: Young Voices. Secondary schools from across London visited the exhibition Malick Sidibé: The Eye of Modern Mali and took part in an interactive programme of activities to discover the world and work of Sidibé and fashion their own poetry in response.

Malick Sidibé was born in Soloba, Mali in 1935 to a family of the Fula people. As he grew up, his skill as a draftsman earned him a place at the School of Sudanese Craftsmen in Bamako, Mali's capital. Graduating from there in 1955, he went on to become a photographer's apprentice. Shortly after purchasing his own Brownie camera, he opened Studio Malick in Bamako in 1958, which soon became a thriving hub in the city centre. In the following years, he became West Africa's most well-known and beloved photographer, joyfully capturing in black and white the celebratory cultural and social life of his people as Mali surged with confidence and exuberance into newfound independence from France in 1960.

The exhibition Malick Sidibé: The Eye of Modern Mali was co-produced by Somerset House and 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair in partnership with Magnin-A Gallery in Paris. It was the UK's first solo show of Sidibé's work and presented 45

original prints from the 1960s and 1970s.

Accompanying the photographs, a gallery soundtrack recreated the spirit and soul of the nightclubs Sidibé frequented every weekend and the party atmosphere of his very own Studio Malick. Curated by DJ, presenter and African music expert Rita Ray, the playlist featured an eclectic mix of music which would have soundtracked Sidibé's photoshoots, from Malian blues through South African jazz to the heady Afrobeat of Lagos and beyond.

The workshops took place within the exhibition space, with students exploring the gallery to discover the elements at the forefront of Sidibé's world that shaped his unique approach to portraiture: music, celebration, joy, freedom, youth, independence and hope for the future...

Through his photographs, they encountered young partygoers dancing the night away in the throbbing heart of Mali's nightclubs; teenagers cooling off in the early hours by the banks of the River Niger; and all manner of everyday 'models' visiting the studio, dressed to the nines in striped suits, the latest wax prints, the hippest styles, hair elaborately adorned, accessories abounding. The people of Mali had found their visionary in Sidibé: a man whose sharp eye captured them as they wished to be seen at this seminal moment in their country's life.

After sharing their initial responses to this stunning collection of images, our young poets worked collaboratively

to view the photographs in more depth, using the soundtrack to enhance their understanding of the jubilant atmosphere of Bamako on the brink of independence.

A matching game using a series of Haiku poems produced by the Royal African Society in response to the photographs inspired the students to develop new connections between image and word, sparking keywords for their own poetry.

Each student crafted their own poem, fired by a particular image or series from the exhibition which were then decorated, displayed and photographed. Using the Afrobeat music as a springboard, the young poets performed their poetry to the group in a variety of styles including songs, raps, some with accompanying dance moves.

In the spirit of Malick Sidibé and his work, we have brought their work together here to be shared in a heady celebration of a newfound confidence, a shout-out of Young Voices.

Royal African Society

The Royal African Society is a membership organisation that provides opportunities for people to connect, celebrate and engage critically with a wide range of topics and ideas about Africa today. Through our events, publications and digital channels we share insight, instigate debate and facilitate mutual understanding between the UK and Africa. We amplify African voices and interests in academia, business, politics, the arts and education, reaching a network of more than one million people globally.

www.royalafricansociety.org

Africa Writes Festival

Africa Writes is the Royal African Society's annual literature festival. Every year we showcase established and emerging talent from the African continent and its diaspora in what is now the UK's biggest celebration of contemporary African writing taking place over an exciting summer weekend in July. The festival takes place at the British Library and features book launches, readings, author appearances, panel discussions, youth and children's workshops and other activities.

www.africawrites.org

Africa Writes: Young Voices

Africa Writes: Young Voices is the flagship project of the Royal African Society's education programme. Committed to championing African literature and inspiring the writers of the future, we connect young people directly with poets and writers from the Africa Writes Festival community.

We work in partnership with key organisations such as the British Library, universities, museums and teaching associations to deliver our programme. Workshops are led by professional writers and facilitators and may take place within exhibitions, museum spaces or in schools. We are proud of our collaborative model. All the writers take time to get to know the students they are working with, carefully selecting texts to inspire and activities to encourage participants to find their own creative voice.

Africa Writes: Young Voices 2017 was our pilot education project. Using African art forms such as literature, spoken word, proverbs, music, visual art and photography, the workshops were designed to inspire and guide students to create their own pieces of poetry or narrative fiction in response. Participating writers were also supported to develop live performances of their own work for a showcase event at the British Library on Saturday 1 July 2017.

We are delighted to be presenting this anthology of work produced by the extraordinary young people we have been working with this year.

Joanna Brown

Education and Outreach Programme Manager,
Royal African Society

Addey and Stanhope School

ADDEY AND STANHOPE

Addey and Stanhope is a co-educational inclusive comprehensive secondary school in the heart of Lewisham. It has a truly diverse population, with many children of African heritage backgrounds and over 60 different languages being spoken in the school.

Twenty students from a Year 8 English class attended the workshops at Somerset House in February 2017 with English Teacher Fianna Bromley and EAL Co-ordinator Cecilia Wylde. They explored the work of Malick Sidibé with energy and enthusiasm: their poetic responses capture the vibrancy of a unique political and cultural moment in time.



Malick Sidibé, *Combat des amis avec pierres* 1976

FREEDOM AT LAST

by Naima, Amina, Anais

Free, liberated, unchained,
Independent.
My teeth gleam as I step
Into the new world:
Independent, strong and free.

Men wearing flared pants
As they celebrate
Like soaring birds in
The sky.
For the first time
Power has come to
Us.
I step over the threshold
Like I'm entering freedom itself.
Songs being sung,
Drums being drummed,
Noises I've never heard before.
As they walk up to a new year each step
They pass brings a beautiful smile.
As my body feels the beat,
I'm alive again!

WE ARE THE PEOPLE OF AFRICA

by Ishra

We were controlled once.
We had no rights.
We had to fight.
We are the People of Africa.

We fought side by side
Mother and Father
Sister and Brother
United as one
We are the People of Africa.

Tears were shed,
Blood was spread
We fought until the land was red.
We are the People of Africa.

Nobody can hold us down.
We shout loud and proud.

We are the People of Africa.

THE PRIDE OF MALI

by Brandon and Corey

Standing proud
Under the sun
We are united
Having fun.
We won't stop till the day is done.
Being family
Being free
That is how we like to be.

Cooling off
In the river
Not too cold,
So we don't shiver.
Splashing and swimming around
We are lucky to have freedom now.

We came from hell,
Now we are in heaven
Some of us were only eleven.
Fighting for rights
But we had none
All we wanted to do was run.
Standing proud
Under the sun
We are united, having fun.
We won't stop till the day is done.

THE POEM OF FREEDOM

by Giovanni

When you fight for freedom
And you think you can
Then you think you're better than...

When you fight for freedom
And the fight's all done
What is there to do except have fun?

When you fight for freedom
And the fun is done
What you do is dance and run.

When you fight for freedom
And the dancing is done
What do you do, but take photos in the sun?

WE ARE ONE

by Giselle

I am happy, I am free.
At long last we have our independence.

Now that we are swimming
In freedom,
I am excited to see what the
Future holds.
No more conflict,
No more sorrow.
A huge obstacle has been removed.
I am free, I am over the moon.
My life is unlocked and now we are unified,
We are one.

STUDIO AND THAT...

by Joshua

In the studio
Photography is second nature,
Where we dress as cowboys and ballers.

Us 'negroes' wouldn't get this far.

Snap after snap,
Pose after pose.
Each entity a cosplay artist.
Listening to jazz,
Swaying side to side.

At the end,
We celebrate and party.
Our photos make us rich men.
We return our costumes to be workmen again.
We looked rich.
Now poor.
We've got nothing to live for anymore.
Nothing but the studio.

THREE MEN

by Muktar

Three men
Shepherds
Listening to Jazz
Tapping, swinging,
Side to side
Clicking fingers
Bobbing heads
The beat is HARD.
The mood is LIVE.
The people are POWER!



Malick Sidibé, *Sur les rochers à la Chaussée* 1976

INDEPENDENCE

by Reuben

With screams of joy
Mali danced all the way.
The past was torture,
But now we have a future.
Strong as one, we fight.
We had nowhere to go
But we can finally say we have a home.
We walk into Paradise
Where everything is right.
Where there's no death and no stress.
We'll continue to strive:
With love and tenderness in our hearts,
We wash away our scars.
Trials and tribulations may come our way
But nothing will take
Our special day.
Sorrow and joy,
Strength in numbers.
We shout.
With no doubt,
We are independent.

FREEDOM PEACE

by Dashiell

Freedom, peace,
Everyone parties in the sea and on the land.
Everybody is smiling and dancing with joy,
Peaceful minds in the clear skies,
Creating memories and moments that we love.

We'll go to the photographer that everyone loves:
Malick Sidibé!

FIGHTING FROM DAY 1

Perspectives have changed
Since back in the day
When Mali got their independence
And danced the night away.

Fighting for freedom
Teamwork will lead them to heaven
Where angels will bless them.
Cultural factors
Beg to be captured
Craving attention
To show off their fashionable party intentions.

Brothers and sisters
From other mothers
Will have my back no matter what.
If we get knocked down,
We'll fight back.
No doubt about that.

PHOTOS!

Hats of fun!
Belts, too.
The floor, wall,
Fun for all.
Photos – have a ball!

WE3

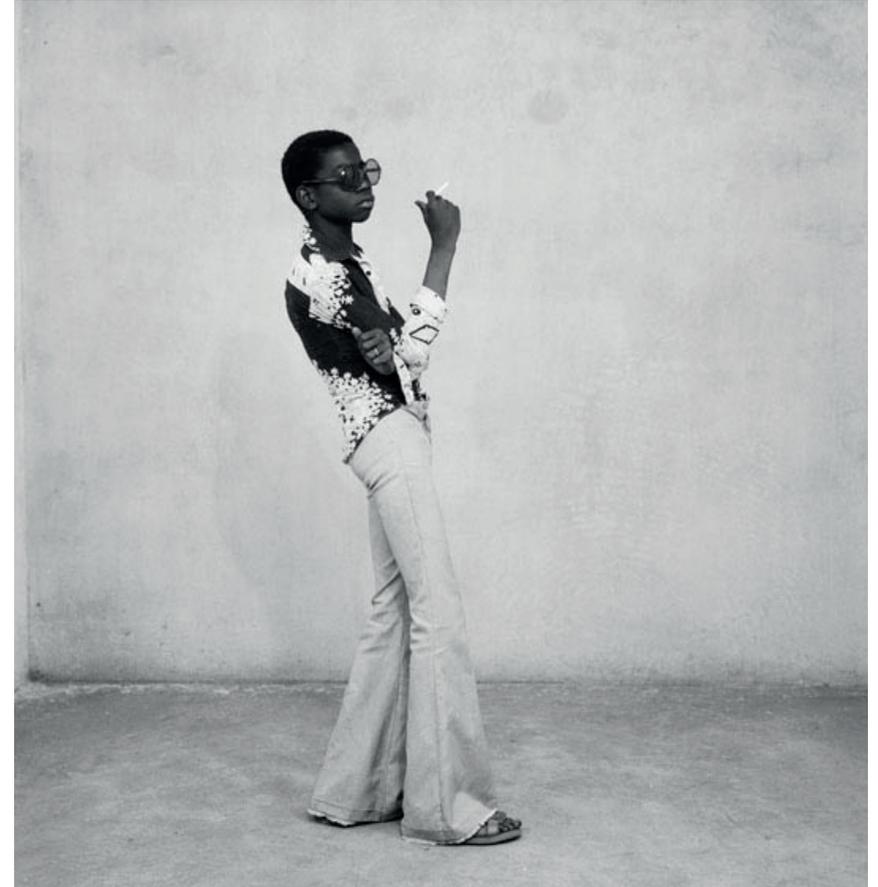
We three unwise boys:
Future's foundations.

Our tower touching the sky,
Scraping cloud nine,
We feel damn fine.

HERE AT LAST

by Aliyah

People dance, my people dance,
For Independence Day is here at last!
Here at last we stand,
Hand in hand, entwined,
Smiles wide.
Bangs of drums, people cheer -
We are
Truly
United
Once
Again.



Malick Sidibé, *Un Yéyé en Position* 1963



Alexandra Park School

ALEXANDRA PARK SCHOOL

Alexandra Park School is a co-educational inclusive secondary school in Haringey, with a thriving weekly Spoken Word Club, where students meet to develop their own poetry independently in an open, supportive atmosphere where their creativity can live and breathe. English teacher Lisa Utley brought Spoken Word Club students from Year 7 – Year 13 to the Somerset House workshops to see how Malick Sidibé's work could inspire them to write colourful and concise poems.



Malick Sidibé, *A moi seul* 1978

UNTITLED

by Amy

Together – apart
To never depart
Fuelling the fire, feeling the flame
One with my soulmate, never ashamed.

Peacefully, free, him and me
Caring companion, daring to dream,
In my illusion, I am supreme.

UNTITLED

Sunglasses to hide the pain,
Hats to hide the sorrow,
But happening is filling faces as well as the room,
Clothes not in style now,
But were, then.
Tea in shot-glasses,
To make it feel like rum.
But one is out of place:
Not much jewellery,
Not so happy as the others....
What is he hiding?
Is it fear of the camera?
Or something else?
The colours show through the black and white,
But I don't know what the colours are...sadness.

UNTITLED

by Pablo

Broken and scarred
I may appear, but ready for
More, I shall be here...

UNTITLED

by Grace

White jeans, nicotine,
Sunglasses,
Cover my identity,
My sinister look envelopes
Me.

UNTITLED

by Matthew

I'm fearless,
Like a rhino,
I'm happy,
Like a wild baboon,
I'm confident and brave,
Like a crocodile,
This is me and
I have battle scars to prove it!

UNTITLED

by Lena-May

I'm happy and you know it
Clap your hands!
I'm strong because I can carry
Palm leaves.
I'm free because I can walk
And go anywhere.
I have a good life,
I'm looked after,
And that's the main thing.
I love my family and friends,
They care about me,
I am very well-cared for.
I love my clothes,
I love my fashion.

UNTITLED

by Rosa

Swirling all around and around,
Looking like hope had been found,
Love in her eyes,
Up to the skies,
She spread her wings and flew on and on...

UNTITLED

by Clem

Danseur dans la salle blanche
Les tourbillons des chemises,
Regardes-la!
Il danse...

UNTITLED

by Molly

All alone yet strong
Why does independence go so wrong?
I have the world in my hand
Expect I'm the only one in my band
My life is so perfect
No pain to detect
It's just me....the reject.

BEAUTY

Pride held in starry eyes
Soul and strength
Are their backbone
Of collarbone contour
(Nuit de Noel 1963)

UNTITLED

by Ellie

Music fills the room
Brings us life and colour
Bottles round our feet.

DANCING

by Phoebe

Us together, us
Black and white, yet so
Colourful,
Peaceful, exciting,
Making it up as we go along,
Opposites, a
Jigsaw
Forever love, me, you
Celebratory connection
We dance, we adore, we go.
Us.

UNTITLED

by Molly

Night fever, too hot!
Swirls, flares, dancing everywhere.
Must sleep. Rave. Repeat.

UNTITLED

by Ben

eyes that tell of JOY
vinyl armour PROTECT thee,
boy who SING through pain.

UNTITLED

by Rosa

Swirling all around and round
Looking like hope had been found
Love in her eyes
Up to the sky's
She spread her wings
And flew on and on
And now she's gone
They love her still
She's flying the world
She's free

UNTITLED

by Rosa

Back to back
Oh so still
Yet we won't stop moving
Oh our minds never will
They race each other
For who can love more
But all love is one
So it is a draw.

ALL'S FAIR IN RACE AND WAR

by Beth

This society is a product of the
Decisions my and their ancestors made.
'Sorry' is a word too weak for the consequences
Jim Crow and his men placed walls
An inspiration for the modern day republican
Only in those times, the 'inferior' wasn't
Relied on to build it.
Nor to knock it down.

I know as the tensions built,
The titanium steeled into
Irreversible lynchings now
Fiercely steady to one-shot shootings
In the land-of-the-lifetime-incarcerated-based-on-pigment
I know 'sorry' is not enough to stop
A movement of unity becoming a
Soulless tumblr post on white suppression,

Fact of the matter is I will never know what it is
Watch my fioncé die in front of me while my
Four year old daughter is lying on the floor
Of the backseat of the same car
Because a black woman has done it for me.

Never been told to 'get on my knees'
After the incident
Never been told there isn't sufficient evidence,
Never been told my daughter misses her daddy,

Never been hung, beaten and raped
For white man pleasure
Bloodline ugliness.

27 years imprisoned is now
A death sentence
We are too aware of
'Black and White',
Shade, Science, Colour, Race,
A contrast in too many instances

I know what it is to have my country split in two,
I will never know what it's like to not have a home,
Feeling like you're everywhere and nowhere at the same time.

'Sorry' is not a word to do-over centuries of torment
Even when it is the only thing I know to feel

I can't change the visions of a mis-shapen majority
All I can do is stand with you,
As if privilege is enough to fight against itself.
I am fed up of the internet being filled
Of humanity killing itself

Hearts were never made to be so easily broken
But to be the pillars of our strengthened souls
Hearts never expected us to build
More graveyards for the
Coloured children of the future
But to strengthen the barriers between
Life and death especially when
It was NEVER asked for.

Whilst I do not know your pain,
I know the frustration of universal tears
Not being enough to stop a war
People refuse to acknowledge,

It is happening on their doorstep.
We know those people aren't part of a unity,
Sometimes 'all lives matter' makes sense,
Not for non existent white suppression

But because when we stand together
We create an image more powerful than God -

We know the bed linen is too thin
To wipe the blood coming from
What will become our timeline

I know all we can do is speak
We need answers
A solution to fix a dissolved community

All we can do is speak
In hopes that someone louder
Will one day start listening.

UNTITLED

by Keir

Bare feet and Dancing
Expensive, young, clothing, YES
Shoes, No Need

UNTITLED

by Keir

The Young and...
Teacher, Smiles at circumcised
They Cry at Night

LIBERTÉ

by Ben

Origins of all the things we claim to create.
The seat of power in the world that met a twisted fate.
Raped,
Stolen,
Murdered,
Made Irate
Lakes of knowledge corrupt by thick-run blood.
Spirit silenced,
But silence is made to be broken.
Broke through,
Broke out,
Independent shout.
Cry of freedom rings from deep rivers to tall trees
And texts telling of how nice it feels to finally breathe
After being buried beneath a gunman's feet.
Their idyll becomes ours,
Their affluent our influence for our record sounds.
Singing through the pain
Dancing in shell rain.
Fashioning fashion from fear they'll copy in 20 years
Steal back style.
Smile on your own.
Because having your teeth exposed by foreign fingers renders your emotions
meaningless can't tell if it's our weakness or their wickedness.
But now our faces finally free.
To show teeth in a smile not a snarl, to show eyes wide, to show nothing at
all.
Because that's what free be.

UNTITLED

by Jade

I smile as you wrap your arms around me
I smile while I stare deep into your eyes
Searching each other's galaxies
In hopes of finding black holes
So that we are able to become even more immersed
Into each other's souls
I smile cause I can see you're so deeply in love with me

I smile because we're free

The way you held me close, tightly too
The day on the 20th of June
We were linked mentally and physically too
Beyond any tangible form
Our lips touched as if it were our first kiss
Our heads formed a love heart filed with hope

The music stopped and everyone froze
Like still people in a photograph
A moment of joy
Laughing, smiling, jumping, dancing
With excitement in their hands
We're finally free
I can't believe it
I can't believe you're with me



Malick Sidibé, *Nuit de Noël (Happy Club)* 1963

Central Foundation School for Girls

CENTRAL FOUNDATION SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

Central Foundation Girls' School is a dynamic and diverse girls' school in Tower Hamlets. Twenty Year 10 students visited the Malick Sidibé exhibition at Somerset House with their English teacher Ele Lamb and participated with verve and energy in the poetry workshop, experimenting with Haiku forms as a basis for their own poetic responses.



Malick Sidibé, *Les jeunes bergers Peulhs* 1972

CHANGING FATE

Gods are smiling
She is not
Broken and barefoot
Hunting for happiness
She hides her emotions
And tries to be strong
But hides away like a coward
Afraid of the dark
It's too late
You can't change fate.

THE THREE MUSES

Queens of the West,
Melanin glistening,
Static expression mixed with joy,
Draped in silk and royal robes,
Direct descendants of Aphrodite herself,
The muses sit – a royal aura around them.

UNTITLED

Three boys standing tall
Their strong bond and feeling proud
Their freedom, held.

UNTITLED

Three children with cheerful childhood
Strongly united, joyfully bonding together spontaneously
The Bridge they built stands tall,
United.

UNTITLED

by Shuheda

Their eyes glistening
as they exploded to the
beat
of Western music.

UNTITLED

by Shamsa

Gold water
Reveals
Limbs
Smiles
Hope
New freedoms

YOUR MAJESTY

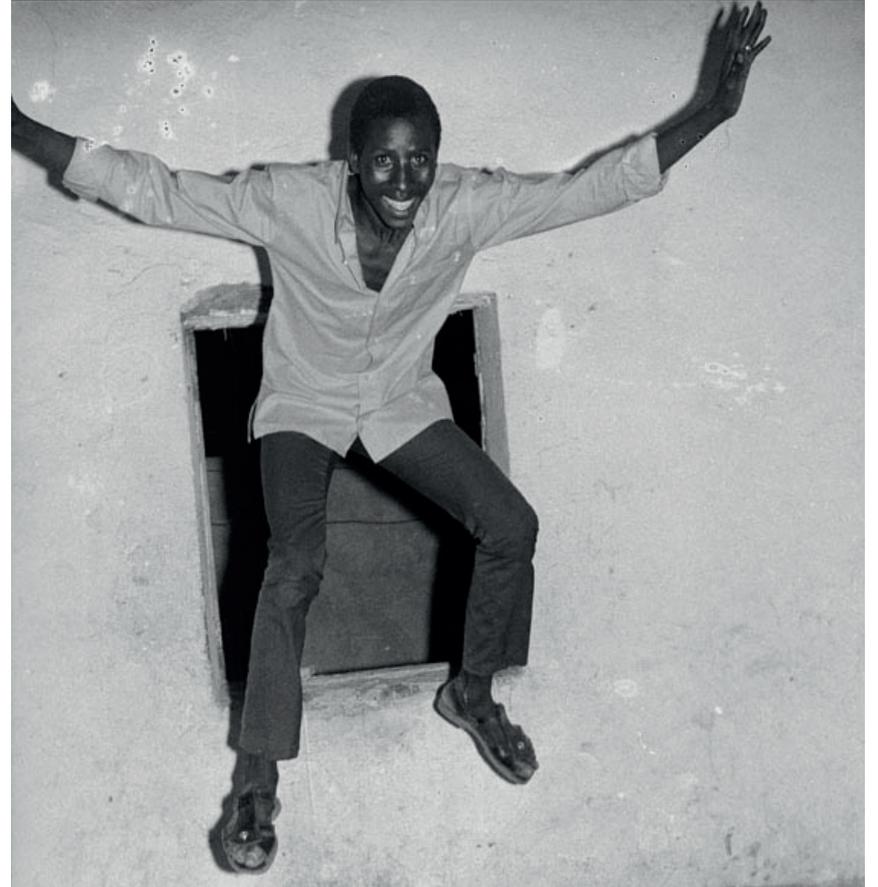
by *Sahera and Mona*

Satin gold, royal robes,
Glistening women of nature
On the royal throne.

UNTITLED

by *Anjima*

Look at images
On the walls -
Black in middle
White on each side.
Detectives,
Hands in pockets.
Angry people.
Black eyes,
Hats.
Don't mess with me.
Not happy?



Malick Sidibé, *Je viens du ciel! Les jeunes sympathiques* 1968



Phoenix Place



Malick Sidibé, *Nuit du 31 Décembre 1969*

PHOENIX PLACE

Phoenix Place is a specialist alternative education provision offering curricular and vocational opportunities for girls aged 11-16 in Southwark and surrounding boroughs. Four girls from Phoenix Place attended the workshop, with teachers Pallavi Patel and Mica Wilson, working collaboratively and individually to generate their illustrated poems. We are delighted to be continuing to work with more Phoenix Place students on further Africa Writes projects.

UNTITLED

by Charlotte

Unreal pose
Rocks clenched in their bare hands
Scenery from a distance...

Nothing to be seen.

Natural sand, trees and water
Beneath their feet
Body language says it all.
Her face is placid
Her posture is strong.

UNTITLED

by Reanna and Rebecca

Twinkle, twinkle
in the night.

She's free,
barefooted
her dress shines
bright
their stepping brings
joy, happiness, fun,
they are the stars!

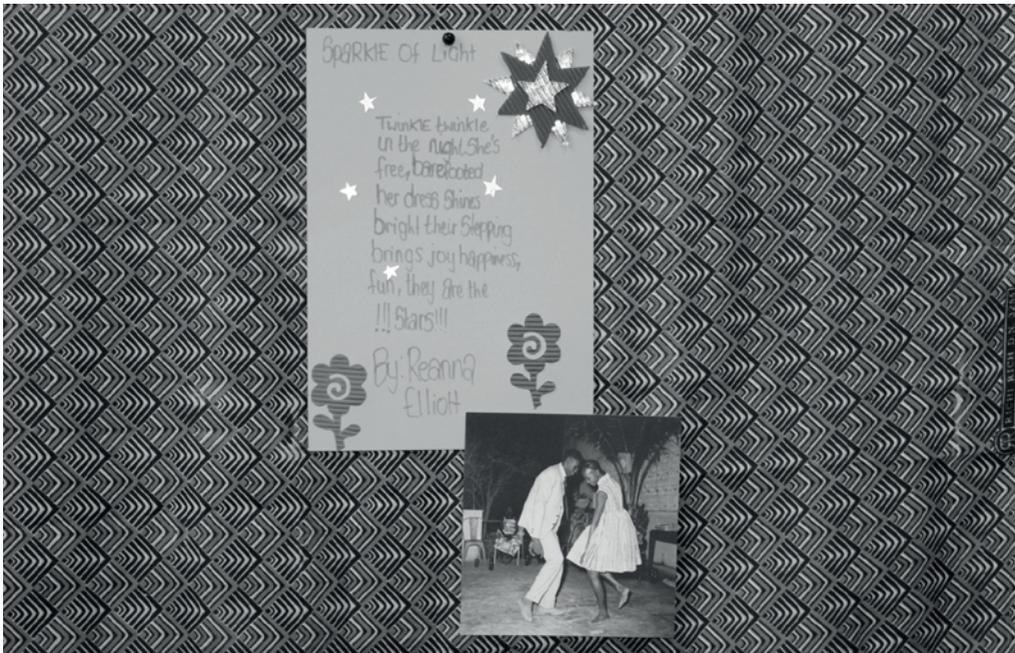
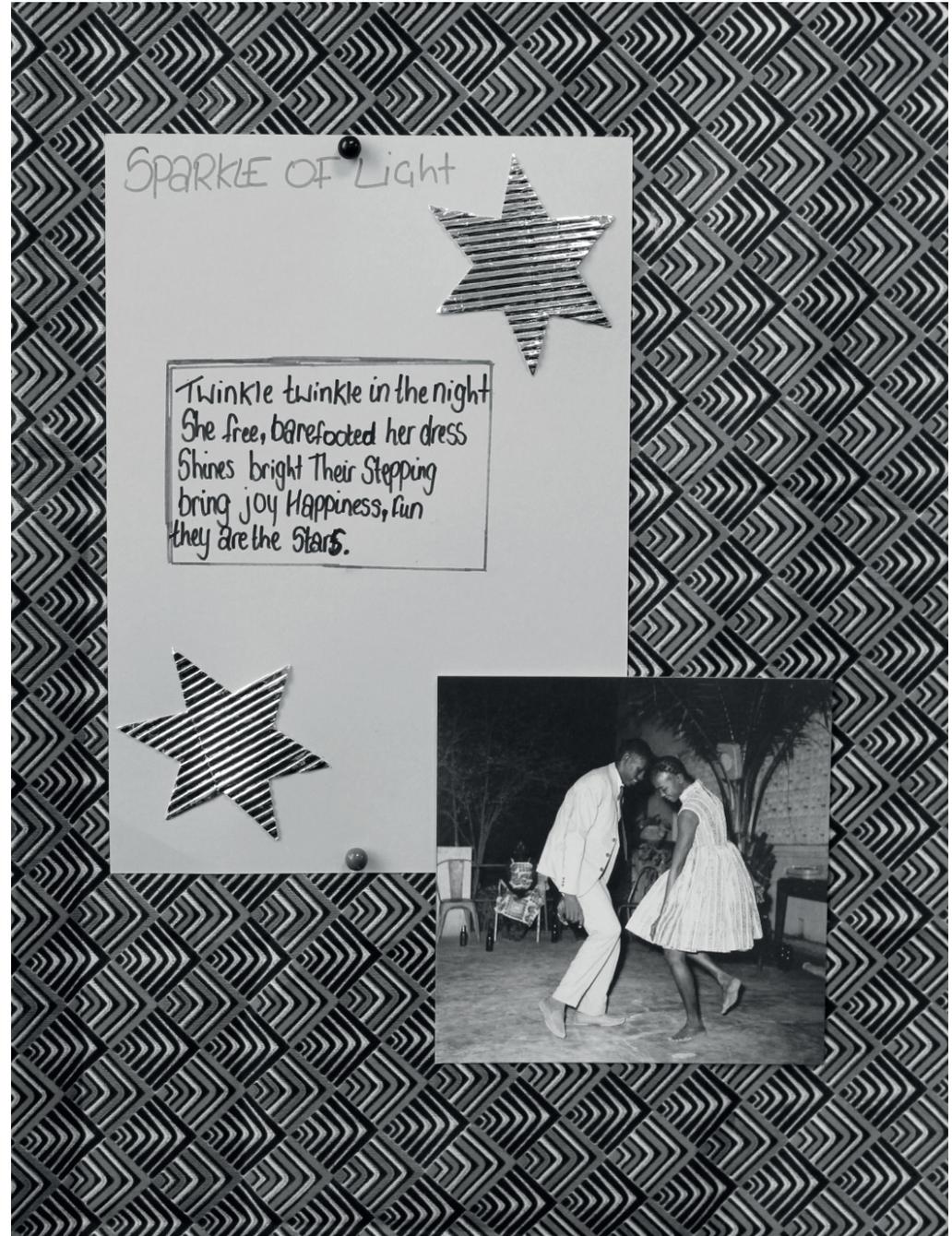
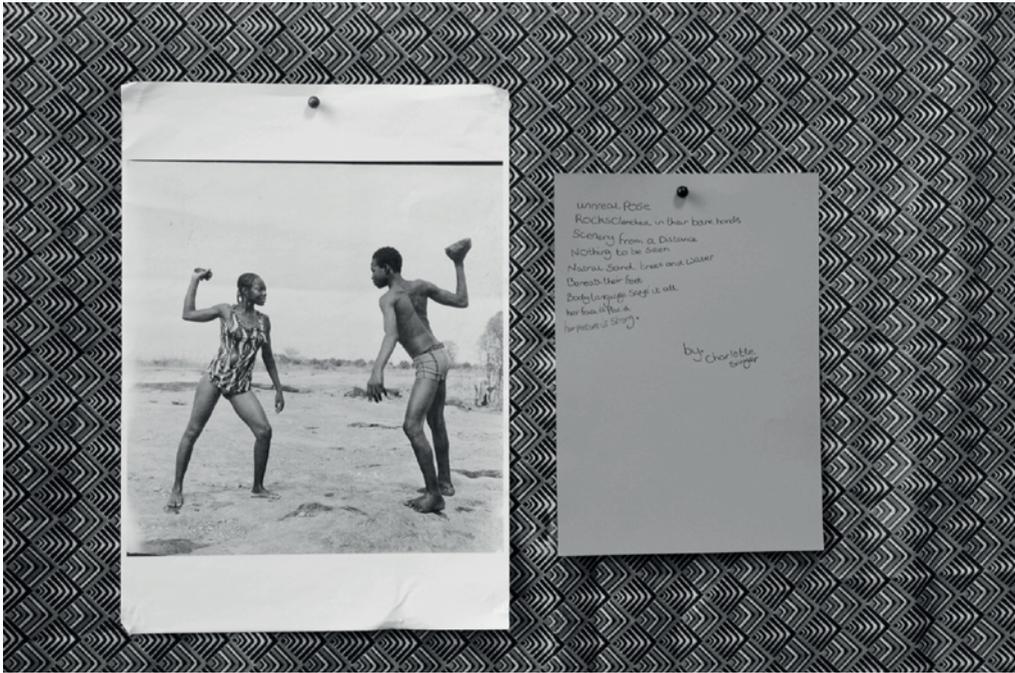
UNTITLED

by Ray

Confident as he stands tall,
Blending in with the wall,
Most cutting edge of them all:
Always wins the prize for the best dressed at the ball.

To fit in he feels he has to fake -
Can tell by the awkward smile on his face.
His clothes make him look out of place.

Thinks of himself as the alpha male
But uses his clothes as camouflage.
Wants to be the big bad wolf - yet he is scared of being nocturnal.



St Marylebone Bridge School



Malick Sidibé, *A la plage* 1974

ST MARYLEBONE BRIDGE SCHOOL

St Marylebone Bridge is a small specialist school in Paddington offering innovative education for students aged 11-18 with speech, language and communication needs. A group of 10 students attended the Malick Sidibé exhibition and workshops with their Arts teacher, Nicola Hinde, immersing themselves in the images and music before writing and performing their own fresh and vibrant responses.

IN 1976

by Omar

In 1976 they go up against each other.
As two friends they fight,
Out of control,
The stones they throw
Throw hard and fast,
Fast and slow.
Freedom we have
Freedom we love
Love is what we have
Love is all we need
The water around our feet makes us feel hope.

THE GROOVE

by Shamina and Tammy

I am dancing with the others
I've got the moves
I've got the grooves
We play
We dance
We party around
I smile like a rock, shining like a diamond
Do the limbo
To the music, to the mambo!

STANDING UNITED

by Yussef

Me and my guys are addicted to the rapping
White and black like Michael Jackson
If you're looking for me
I'm in the streets and you know where I'm at
Me and my guys got all them bands and fans!
Beautiful girls say 'Where d'you get those expensive clothes?'

GROOVER AND MOVER

by Rammell

I'm a dancer!
I have the grooves and I have the moves
I smile like a rock.

I got all the tall people in my dance group.

Lumbo Lumbo Lumbo as I mambo
The dance group moves
Like a dancer,

THE BOXER'S POEM

by Dijon

In 1973
The boxer is fast and furious!
Like a bee,
He beats
people for fun, see?
Funky music
Funky finishing move
Like an uppercut
He moves like a mirror
He will knock you out
He's a winner
But don't ask him why
Cos he be doin' it anyway
Don't ask him why
Cos he be doin' it anyway
Don't be a splitter
Or else he'll-a kill ya!

THE BOXER

by Hattab

He's a fighter, he's a boxer, he's a wrestler.

Look at his gloves -
He's standing strong
He's standing tough
He has a serious face,
Serious muscles.

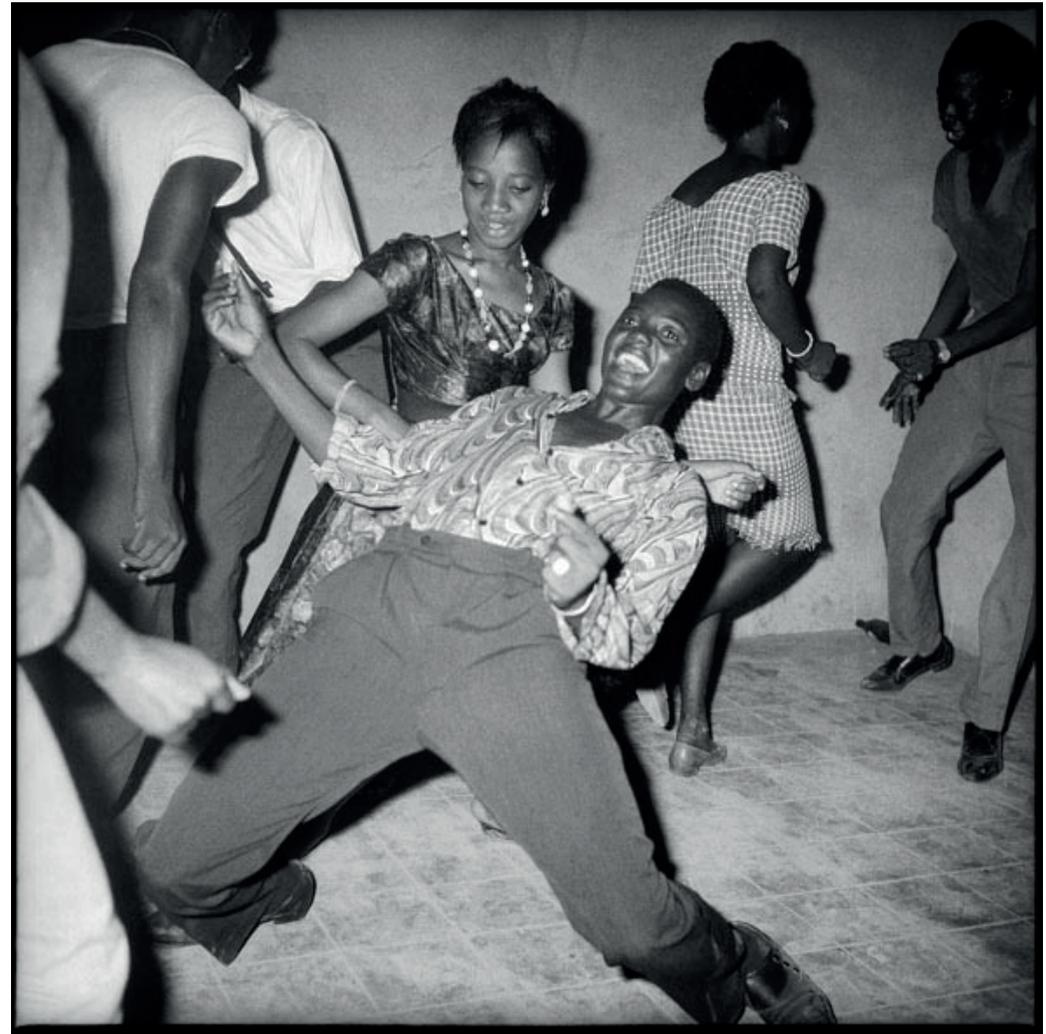
Look at his knuckles -
Looking strong,
Looking tough,
Thinking about fighting
Thinking about winning.
Looking strong,
Looking tough.

Look at his fighting face -
He looks proud, strong, ready.
Ready to box,
Ready to wrestle,
Ready to fight.

THE BOXER

by Victory

He's got an angry face.
He's dangerous.
He's got power.
He's ready to fight.
His biceps are loaded.
Ready to fight -
He's furious!



Malick Sidibé, *Regardez-moi!* 1962



Perspectives have changed
Since back in the day
When Mali got their independence
And danced the night away...

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Young Voices

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